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## ALFRED BRUNSON, PIONEER OF WISCONSIN METHODISM

ELLA C. BRUNSON

With his characteristic regard for detail, the subject of this sketch opened the "Birth Record" of his immediate family with: "Alfred, born in Danbury, Ct. on the morning of Feby 9, 1793, in one of the worst snow storms of history." Frequently through life, when referring to this event, he expressed some curiosity to know whether the storm had had any influence on his career, which, at times, bore a close resemblance to the weather on the day of his advent. His father, Ira, was a direct descendant of Richard Brownson, a member of the company of Rev. Joseph Hooker, who came in 1633 from Braintree, England, to escape the religious intolerance of that period. Alfred was the oldest of the seven children born to Ira and Permelia Cozier Brownson. As young Alfred grew up he attended school, in the winter seasons, from the age of seven to that of twelve years, but his time in summer was needed to help his father who was crippled with rheumatism, contracted through overindulgence in athletic games and subsequent careless exposure.

When Alfred was seven years old the family removed to Sing Sing, New York, where his father operated a ferry across the Hudson River, conducted an inn at the landing, and established and managed a brickyard and a stone quarry. The eldest son, a large and unusually sturdy lad, a natural adept and an apt pupil, soon became an expert in many occupations, and as his father's assistant learned to run the ferry-boat, a piragua of two masts. He thus acquired a nautical knowledge of inestimable value to him in his pioneer life on the western frontier, where much of the travel was by the waterways. Young Alfred's chief pastime was casting cannon, making wooden guns, and building forts; as a leader

among his comrades he equipped them with arms and trained them as soldiers in the methods of warfare which he learned from his books and from the conversation of his elders. So marked was his military taste that his father planned to educate him for the army, and to this end sent him to a local academy which prepared students for West Point. But the accident in 1806 that cost his father's life brought the boy's air castles to the ground, and changed the entire trend of his life. During a violent gale his father, returning from across the river, attempted to land the boat, when, hampered by heavy clothing and his movements hindered by his crippled condition, he was struck by the sail and brushed into the water. Alfred, seeing the accident from a distance, ran to the landing, sprang into a skiff, and, with a man to row for him, attempted to effect a rescue; but the wet hair of the drowning man slipped through the lad's fingers, and, powerless to help him, he saw his father sink for the last time. Although a mere boy in years, this incident made the lad a man; from that hour he assumed, with his mother's aid, the care of the six younger children. When the estate of the father was settled an error on the part of the lawyer in charge changed the spelling of the name from Brownson to Brunson, an orthography retained by the family since that time. (Other branches dropped the *w*, spelling the name Bronson, while still others retain the original orthography, Brownson.)

It was deemed advisable, in view of the changed circumstances of the family, to return to Danbury where young Alfred was apprenticed to a shoemaker, his mother's brother, son of Benjamin and Sarah Cozier, early and prominent settlers of Connecticut. Alfred soon became proficient in this trade, and in the new country to which he was later to emigrate it proved a useful acquirement.

Someone once said: "A great man condemns his friends to the task of explaining him." This was sufficiently true of Alfred Brunson to justify a few words regarding his personal

appearance and characteristics. One's first impression upon meeting him was that he was an austere man, abrupt and gruff, but when one came to know him, he was found to be genial and approachable, while the abiding impression made by his strong personality was that of a plain honest man who loved justice and fair dealing. In person he was straight, well-knit, and powerful, weighing in his full vigor from two hundred to two hundred twenty-five pounds; he was as athletic as his own father had been, dignified in carriage, with a long head, jaw square rather than oval, a massive forehead, above which, after his fortieth year, was a halo of grey hair. Thus he was distinguished and attractive in appearance.

Much of the literary activity to which the later years of his life were devoted was in the nature of controversy, but he conducted it without bitterness or narrowness. If the subject was one upon which his experience gave him authority to speak, he wrote naturally, with a good command of language for a self-educated man. His zeal for what he thought to be the truth sometimes led him to vehemence of expression, but even his intensity was coupled with charity of spirit toward his opponent, his antagonism being directed toward the error rather than the person. Loyalty was a deep and fixed principle of his conduct; for his country, his church, and his friends, he was an able advocate, but woe to the perverter of truth, the traitor, or the inhumane; for them he had at his command severe language, and in his denunciation of crime or injustice he never minced his words. Hospitable to the verge of embarrassing his family, he always kept "the latch-string out," and especially welcome, next to those of his kin, were "those of the household of faith." No visitor came with a need, temporal or spiritual, that it was not promptly met to the best of the host's ability, and he frequently said in later years that the "bread cast upon the water" in pioneer days, returned long afterwards in the form of loaves for crumbs. How he loved inquiring youth! No questioner ever came to him that

pen, paper, or book was not gladly laid aside to consider and explain any matter within his ken. No one, however, knew his limitations better than he himself, and if not able to answer a question, he promptly admitted the fact, but lost no time in acquiring all possible knowledge upon the subject. He particularly admired a good command of language, and often said that he acquired his own knowledge of its use by listening to the best scholars and remembering their construction of sentences and use of words.

To his keen sense of the ludicrous and love of a good story, of which he had a rare collection, Mr. Brunson attributed his ability to throw off and forget annoyances that to other natures would have been a serious handicap. With a really good and appropriate story for all occasions he often turned what promised to be a grievous altercation into a hearty laugh, ending the matter in complete understanding. He never laughed aloud, but shook and chuckled till tears rolled down his cheeks, and long after turning his attention to other things a smile would play about his mouth.

Prematurely developed by the circumstances of his early life, and the hardships then the lot of those dependent upon their own resources, Alfred Brunson took up a man's work before he was out of his teens. The invincible spirit displayed in his boyhood games remained with him through life. Having assured himself that he was right before he undertook any new or unusual task, nothing dismayed or made him afraid; his mind was firmly fixed upon the thought that the Divine Power, upon which he depended with a childlike faith, was with him in all things. Never, after his conversion, which was the direct result of his father's tragic death, did he doubt for a moment that he was led, guided, and, in answer to prayer, directed in what he did. If his efforts met failure, he judged that the fault was within himself, or that it was providential interference, and that there was something else for him to do, in which he would succeed.

After several years at Danbury, Connecticut, Alfred Brunson was married at the age of nineteen to Eunice Burr, a distant cousin of Aaron Burr, and the young couple soon went as missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church to the Western Reserve, a new field in far-away Ohio. Finding himself near the frontier where the struggle between the new country and England was in progress, he placed his family in safety, and enlisted in the Twenty-seventh United States Infantry, then being recruited at Warren, Ohio, and was made orderly sergeant of his company. His diary of the ensuing campaign is now in the Wisconsin State Historical Library. The author's experiences likewise furnished the topic for many a long winter evening story, never to be forgotten by his children and friends. They loved to persuade him to relate his early adventures, for he was a natural storyteller, and with his remarkable memory and his well-stored mind, he made an evening pass most entertainingly.

Among the incidents narrated by him of that historical period, one that never failed to hold the attention of his children concerned the primitive methods of living in the camp of that early day. The crude manner of preparing their rations, to which the soldiers were driven in 1812, proved the old adage: "Necessity is the mother of invention." Once while the members of his company were camping at the mouth of the Huron River, waiting for a violent wind to subside before they could cross on their route to Fort Stevenson, they found themselves separated from even their limited camp equipment, but having rations with them, they prepared them much after the manner of the native Americans whom they were fighting. They built a fire of driftwood on the shore, mixed flour and river water in pieces of bark or any receptacle they were fortunate enough to have, and without salt, yeast, or shortening wrapped the dough in bark or leaves, and baked it in the ashes, or before the open fire as the hoecake of the South is baked. Bits of salt pork impaled on sticks were

broiled to a turn, and both bread and meat tasted like a banquet to the tired and hungry men.

A story of the sentinel, who mistook a black turkey for an Indian and shot it, was a never ending source of entertainment to his children. The shot that killed the turkey alarmed the whole camp and brought the men to arms. How the rising moon, full and red, was mistaken for the dreaded English craft *Queen Charlotte*, armed with "seventeen long guns," the terror of the Lakes, was another tale that held us spell-bound. Preparations were at once made to give the visitor a warm welcome, and the soldier boys were greatly disappointed when the alarm proved to be false. Real soldier experiences were the long nights of camping with no shelter from pouring rain, when the men were obliged to lie upon their guns to keep them dry, expecting every moment to be attacked. So infested were the woods with skulking, hostile Indians, that American soldiers passing from one of their own camps to another were frequently killed, as were many of the men who went out to rescue the bodies of their fallen companions. Mr. Brunson heard the story of the death of the great war chief, Tecumseh, from the lips of the chief's own aide-de-camp. In after life he prepared an article on this much-mooted subject which was published in the fourth volume of the *Wisconsin Historical Collections*.

At the expiration of his year of enlistment, General Cass, under whose direct observation Sergeant Brunson had served at the head of a platoon in the stead of a commissioned officer, sent for him and offered him the first vacancy among the lieutenants; the company also asked the privilege of buying his uniform and sword if he would remain with them, but he declined both offers, preferring to "be about his Father's business" in the calling to which he had consecrated his life. So he returned to Ohio to continue his missionary work. Long quiet years of earnest effort followed, while one after another his children were born and a little family grew up around him.

These were years of self-sacrifice and hard work, preparatory to his future upon the far American frontier. His last station in that part of the country was at Meadville, Pennsylvania, where he was for several years a member of the board of trustees of Allegheny College.

In 1835 a call came for missionaries to go to the Northwest Territory, to minister both to the whites and to the Indians of the frontier. Mr. Brunson was instrumental in bringing the need before the Pittsburgh Conference, of which he was a member, and the presiding bishop urged him to accept the responsibility of founding a mission in this new field. His family consented that he should visit the country before deciding to move there, and he soon set forth in company with his colleague, the Reverend Mr. Weigley. In six weeks, in a buggy with two horses, they drove over one thousand miles from Meadville to Springfield, Illinois. From the first glimpse thereof they were attracted to the western country and determined to make it their future field of work. They reached Illinois in time to attend the annual conference, the farthest western Methodist conference then organized. At that session Mr. Weigley was assigned to the district of Galena, while Mr. Brunson's circuit covered the territory from Rock Island, Illinois, to St. Anthony's Falls, Minnesota, a district five-hundred miles in length, and seventy-five in width. Dubuque, Iowa, was the only settlement west of the Mississippi River, and those upon the eastern side were few. Mr. Brunson, in order to enter the country north of the Wisconsin River, made his way on horseback to Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien, arriving there late in the fall of the same year. This trip was often referred to by him as one of the most difficult but one of the most interesting of his whole life. The country was sparsely settled and abounded in wild animals; the road was nature's own highway, except where it was possible to follow the military road made in 1834 by the soldiers from Fort Winnebago (where Portage, Wisconsin,



now stands) to Fort Crawford, at Prairie du Chien. On the outward route Platteville was the first place in Wisconsin where Mr. Brunson stopped. There the proverbial frontier hospitality soon drove from his mind the unpleasant features of the trip. Lancaster was the next settlement reached and here his notes state: "Occupied the room with Sir Charles Murray, a chamberlain of Queen Victoria, sent over by that estimable and enterprising lady, to select lands on which to make entry, but paying taxes for many years and then selling at a loss would indicate a case of mistaken judgment." The journey from Lancaster to Cassville was made with but one break, "at the home of a brother in Christ, where I was most cordially received and entertained in the true pioneer spirit." The people along the route were overjoyed to see a newcomer, and although often but one member of the house was a professed Christian, the entire family welcomed a stranger from the East, particularly when he was one who could be trusted. Church people, of whatever orthodox denomination, were distinctly glad to see a missionary of an established church society, and welcomed a speaker on sacred as well as temporal subjects.<sup>1</sup>

It was truly on the verge of civilization our traveler found himself after crossing the Wisconsin River, but even at that late season he thought it a promising country, and the sandy soil appealed to one tired of clay, mud, and soggy turf, because the rain drained off at once, and in half an hour after a downpour walking was comfortable. Inquiry made of the residents at the little settlement of Prairie du Chien as well as of the military men at the post of Fort Crawford elicited the following information which is copied from the traveler's own notes:

Prairie du Chien, written by the French settlers "*La Prairie des Chiens*,"—and being translated meaning "the prairie of dogs," because of the great number of the little animals found here, was the second settle-

<sup>1</sup> The journal of this trip is published in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, XV, 264-91.

ment in this section. The Fox Indians being camped here at the time of the naming of the settlement, with a chief named "Dog," may have had some influence in the matter of naming the colony. There were well built Indian houses here when the first white man came, and the natives had gardens and live stock, but my own will be the first frame building in the country. The earlier comers learned much of value from the Indians and we in turn gathered from them invaluable information in pioneering useful now and anywhere in an emergency. The use of sugar to preserve meat when salt was exhausted was a new idea, but practical, as are many Indian customs we may well copy. Game was plentiful and all animal food easy to procure, either by traps or from native hunters.

It is of record that in 1804 a Frenchman by the name of Roulette [Rolette] and a Scotchman named Cannon [Campbell] appeared at the settlement and established a fur-trading post among the Indians and French hunters already on the ground, and those who came for many years after. Descendants of Roulette still live here and are counted among the substantial citizens.

When the war of 1812 broke out the inhabitants of this thriving settlement drove out all English sympathizers, and the island in the river being most thickly settled, became the village proper, every precaution being taken for the safety of the settlers. But the English learned of the lack of troops then at the place and surprised the Americans and natives (French) taking and holding possession of the Ft. then established at the north end of the island, until the close of the war in 1816, when Col. Hamilton occupied it and built a blockhouse on the site later occupied by the H. L. Dousman residence. An earthquake was said to have shaken the territory in those early days but none has been felt since.

The location of the Fort it seems was changed twice. The first one was located at the north end of the island, the second on the main land, and the third, built in 1830 by Zachary Taylor, Commandant, stood near the middle of the length of the prairie, on the hill overlooking the river. Taylor was in command at the time of my arrival and to him and his officers I was indebted for many courtesies shown me and my family, our home being made with them in the Fort until the completion of our house, brought with us, and erected half a mile south-east of the Fort.

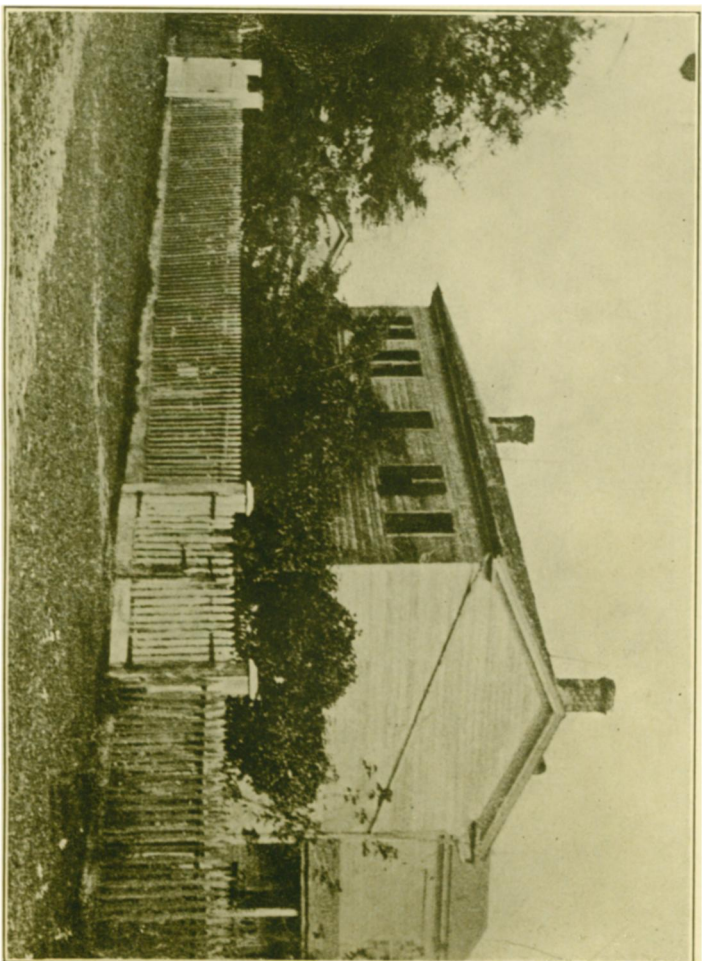
At the time of the building of the last Fort but one American family was numbered among the two-hundred inhabitants of the place, the remainder being French, Indian and half-breeds. But from that date the town had grown and on my arrival there were four-hundred souls within its boundary, three American families, and two-hundred officers and sol-

diers in the garrison. No doubt the protection offered by the Fort, should the need arise, attracted settlers to that locality, and the nature of the soil, the majestic river and beautiful bluffs on both sides of the river, made an attractive setting for a new town. The most prominent of its citizens at this date were the Roulette, Brisbois and Jean Baptist Fari-bault families.

The first steamboat to come up the Mississippi River was the "Virginia" from St. Louis, and its landing was a great event in the history of the place. No citizen able to walk was absent on the occasion, and the feeling that they were really connected with the great outside world, was established. This was increased in 1823 when a post office was established, and mails were received once in two months in the summer, and once in the winter seasons, letters folded in a sheet of fools-cap paper, addressed and stamped on same.

While well pleased from the first with this new country, Mr. Brunson did not consider taking his family farther into the wilds, and decided to locate at Fort Crawford, for protection in case of an uprising among the Indians so thick about them, and not always peaceable. With this thought in mind he purchased of the government a tract of land, and made arrangements for the reception of himself and family on their arrival. Leaving Prairie du Chien December 29, 1835, on horseback, he rode to Meadville, arriving in February, 1836, having been gone from home six months, traveling, mostly in the saddle, about three thousand miles, part of the time in the winter season, without losing a day on account of illness.

Mr. Brunson had in the meantime communicated with his wife, a most businesslike and competent helpmeet, and she had contracted for a keel boat, and a dwelling house, built in sections ready to be put together, every door and window ready for its place—the whole to be loaded at a given date for the journey to the new country. The house, eighteen by thirty-four feet, two stories, with an ell twenty by twenty-seven feet, was ready on the missionary's arrival at home, but business affairs delayed the departure of himself and family until the middle of June. So great was the interest among



**THE OLD BRUNSON HOME AT PRAIRIE DU CHIEN**  
**From a photograph in the Wisconsin Historical Library**

his neighbors at the return of one from the unknown West, that Mr. Brunson was called upon to lecture, to write, and to talk incessantly of what he had seen and learned.

At the hour set for the Brunsons to leave the dock at Meadville, the place was thronged with people, some coming out of curiosity, but most of them as friends to wish the travelers Godspeed, for no one felt they would ever see the venturesome emigrants again. A missionary hymn was sung, prayers were offered, and after a tearful farewell the boat with the family, house, and worldly goods, started on its trip, going down the canal to French Creek, and thence down the Allegheny River to Pittsburgh. With the Brunsons on the boat were two young men who had been engaged for a year's service in the new country, a carpenter and a day laborer. At Portsmouth, Ohio, the party was joined by Mr. Brunson's sister and her family. Her husband was later the founder of the town of Patch Grove, Grant County, residing there until his death.

As far as St. Louis the trip was made by contract with a steamboat captain, who was pledged to tow the flat boat to that place for the sum of two hundred fifty dollars. The trip was made without special incident, except the wetting the passengers received when running the Falls of the Ohio. At St. Louis, for the consideration of six hundred fifty dollars Mr. Brunson contracted for the towing of the boat to Prairie du Chien, where it landed July 16, 1836. He immediately began the erection of the house, splitting the lath for it with his own hand. There are yet to be seen places where the hard lime plaster is from one-half to two inches thick, in order to smooth the inequalities of the handmade lath. The writer visited this house last summer after an absence of thirty years, and found it in a remarkable state of preservation, after its eighty-one years of storm and sunshine, with some of the original plaster still in place.

Prairie du Chien was, at the date of the landing of the Brunson family, the principal depot for the upper Mississippi and its tributaries, most of the travel being along these waterways. All about were bands of Indians, and robberies and murders were not unusual occurrences. Parties leaving Prairie du Chien for distant points went, as far as possible, in fleets too strong for the marauders, exchanging at the Prairie the smaller boats in which they came over inland streams for those of larger size used upon the Mississippi. Each fall they came to the Prairie with goods for the trade, which in those days were brought from Montreal to Green Bay through the Lakes, up the Fox River to where Portage now stands, and thence to Prairie du Chien.

Before Mr. Brunson's advent the first Sunday school in Wisconsin had been established at Prairie du Chien by Mrs. Lockwood, wife of a well-known fur trader, and sister of Major William and Doctor Wright, both stationed at Fort Crawford. Mrs. Lockwood took an untiring interest in all that tended to the educational and religious growth of the town, and to the end of her long and useful life was held in the highest regard by the entire community.

Mr. Brunson felt the need of an interpreter for his missionary work, and learning of a mulatto slave, named Jim Thompson, who had been converted, had something of the missionary spirit, and was above the average of his race in education and mental ability, he approached the slave's master, a Kentucky officer stationed at Fort Snelling, and ascertained that Jim could be purchased for twelve hundred dollars. The missionary then wrote a letter to the Methodist publications of the time, setting forth his need and the ambition of the slave, and the result was that the money was quickly raised and forwarded. Jim was set free and at once became a capable and faithful interpreter. He served long and well, settling at the end of his years of usefulness in St. Paul, where he died at an advanced age, in 1884. He was

a loyal and consistent Christian, devoted as a servant, and never happier than when his voice was lifted in the sweet tones of his mother's race singing the hymns of the church, or the melodies of his own people. He was a famous hunter, and the game needed for food was secured by him on excursions into the wilderness of the great territory. But Jim was not without another inheritance from his mother; his superstitious fears were not always in complete abeyance to his religious belief in Divine protection, and exposed him to many a practical joke played by his associates.

When the Brunsons settled at Prairie du Chien lumber was selling at "twenty dollars per thousand feet as it came from the water, good, bad, and indifferent, and mechanics labor two and a half to five dollars per day, while their method of performing the same was only about enough to give them a good appetite for meals." The west side of the river was without civil government, and the lead mines having attracted wide attention, military authority was frequently necessary to protect the enterprising miners from the aborigines who protested silently but ineffectually against the invasion of the white man. The Indians were eventually persuaded to cede the land to the United States. Justice was but badly administered in this new country, and often the people were compelled to take matters into their own hands; in the event of a serious crime they "gathered at a given place, appointed judge, clerk and sheriff. The empaneled jury, finding a bill against the accused, he was arraigned, counsel and petit jury being provided, and following the usual forms of trial, the culprit was found guilty and hanged all within a few days, although witnesses testified that the form of law was always strictly observed." The primitive days were full of narrow escapes and many dangers, although the Indians were always faithful and friendly to the "White Rabbit," a name given Mr. Brunson by the Kickapoo Indians because of his abundant white hair and gentle patience.

After two or three years of missionary work, Mr. Brunson's health failed, and he determined to study law. In the fall of 1840, after having been admitted to the bar, he was elected to the house of representatives of the territory. That year he first visited Madison, whither the capital had been removed from Belmont, and which he describes as "A beautifully situated village," but "the vice and wickedness of the whole territory seemed to be concentrated there." He was especially shocked at the number of "sharpers" who assembled at the place, "trying to skin Uncle Sam," and the "appointment of as many clerks and officers to the two houses as there were in Congress." But his study of human nature had taught him the folly of making open warfare on every opinion that differed from his own, so he contented himself with using what influence he could when preaching on Sundays in Representative Hall to foil the dishonest and personal ambitions so much in evidence. Mr. Brunson was a Whig in politics, while most of the people of the territory were Democrats; he was, therefore, soon retired from public office. But before this occurred he had been able to forward some important measures that tended to make the West, and particularly the community that elected him, a more desirable place in which to settle. While dissatisfied with the legislative session as a whole, he acquired information that made him in demand later as a campaign speaker.

In 1842 Mr. Brunson received from the federal government, at the suggestion of Governor James D. Doty, a commission as subagent to the La Pointe Indian Agency of the Lake Superior country. The trip to that region, made the following year, was one of intense interest to him, being for the most part, except for the trails of fur traders, through primitive and unexplored territory. Most of the traveling in that country was then by the waterways, and in the summer season, so it was with unusual care that Mr. Brunson's party prepared for the long overland spring journey. The cara-



van consisted of three wagons, nine yoke of oxen, three horses and fourteen men, including Mr. Brunson's oldest son, Jim, the interpreter, and a miner named Whitaker, who was an expert woodsman. They set out on May 24, 1843, as soon as grass for the live stock was well started. Following the ridges of the bluff the leader guided his party through the wilderness, steered by the faithful compass that had piloted him from Pennsylvania, and which was never out of his pocket until the highways and landmarks of the territory were well established. In the four hundred miles traveled, but two stops were made where white men were found, at the Falls of the Black and of the Chippewa rivers, where cities bearing these names now stand. One man during the journey wandered from the camp and was lost among the hills. Following one stream after another he reached the settlement of La Crosse, undergoing hair-raising experiences en route; he thence went up stream to Black River Falls, where he arrived before the caravan did.

The mills at these falls were then in the hands of Mormons, who were preparing to build a city and a temple at Nauvoo; they were prevailed upon to ferry the wagons, horses, and men across the river, while the cattle swam. From this point the course of travel lay northwest. On this lap of the journey two of the three horses wandered away from camp at night and were not found, so the party went on somewhat handicapped. In later years Mr. Brunson was told by a traveler that he had seen the bones of two horses with the remnants of rope by which they had been tied to billets of wood, in the vicinity of the last camp occupied by the caravan; the presumption was that the animals had become entangled in the thicket, and unable to extricate themselves, had been killed by flies which were unusually bad that year.

The wayfarers passed by the pipestone hill so dear to the hearts of all Indians of that day, and in his notes Mr. Brunson says: "That stone will some day become an important article

of commerce because of its ornamental beauty and peculiar quality. It is so soft it can be cut with a knife when taken from the quarry, but polished and exposed to the air becomes as hard as marble." The imposing buildings of the Twin Cities of Minnesota bear out his prophetic statement. In later years Mr. Brunson, when riding through the tunnel on the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway between Mauston and La Crosse, went directly under the trail over which he had passed in 1848.

On all trips through the country, then almost unknown to the white man, Mr. Brunson wrote many letters of a descriptive character, which at every opportunity he mailed back to civilization. These descriptions sometimes found their way into print and drew the attention of people who contemplated emigrating to the West. It was not an unusual occurrence for their author to be called upon by total strangers who gave him the pleasant assurance that their coming to the new country had been due to these articles. Mr. Brunson addressed a letter to Governor Doty, describing his first trip to the Lake Superior region, which description was said to have brought to notice a vast and fertile portion of the territory. It was printed by the order of the territorial legislature, to which the communication was sent by the governor, and, scattered over the states in pamphlet form, it resulted in an exodus to the Black and Chippewa valleys.

In these years of pioneer life Mr. Brunson's natural ingenuity gave him an advantage over many of the newcomers. He was always ready to suggest a way out of a dilemma and some of them were certainly novel ways. The winter of 1855-56 was an unusually early one; the snow fell to a great depth before the ground had frozen. The first heavy fall found him seventy miles from home in a buggy. His Yankee ingenuity came to his rescue, and, securing the assistance of a workman, he set about the business of getting home. They built a rough sled of boards and removing the

wheels from the buggy lashed it firmly to the sled, the pole still serving its purpose, with the wheels fastened under and behind the buggy box. With this device the horses had easy work and reached Prairie du Chien in two days. Dr. Elliott, then editor of the *Christian Advocate*, found endless amusement in this incident, and commenting on it said: "None but a genuine backwoodsman would have thought of such a contrivance."

Living under all the presidents from Washington to Hayes, Mr. Brunson took the keenest interest in every phase of political life, and his pen was frequently active on subjects of national moment. At times he was moved to verse, his most notable production being "Patriotic Piety," which was often printed fifty years ago, after his return from the Civil War. "The Tarpaulin Jacket," a semireligious song, full of nautical terms made to apply to the voyage of life, gave evidence of the hopeful chart by which he steered his own craft.

In an early day Mr. Brunson became a member of the Masonic Order, which he held in regard next to the church he served. In 1850, after suffering defeat in a judicial campaign, he once more entered the Methodist ministry and became a member of the West Wisconsin Conference. Two years later he was appointed presiding elder of Prairie du Chien district. Though sometimes away for months at a time in the performance of his duty, first among the Indians, later as presiding elder, Mr. Brunson had no other home after coming west than Prairie du Chien. He saw the settlement grow from a village to a city, and in all the years felt the deepest interest in its progress, being always ready to participate in any work for the advancement of the community and its welfare. He was the first chairman of a school board in the settlement, chosen some time before a school was really established. "A History of the Lower Town School District" from his pen, read at the dedication of a "new stone

school house" in 1856, is still in manuscript and contains interesting bits of local history. His brief visits home between Sundays, or, when in charge of the Prairie du Chien District he held quarterly meetings in the home town, were looked forward to and planned for as in any family the coming of the dearly beloved head is anticipated. But then, as after he was superannuated, he was never idle, and we seemed to know instinctively that he was not to be disturbed when writing. When work was laid aside, however, he gave us his undivided time and attention, and his family was his sole interest. He had in an early day built in one end of the carriage house a long and well-equipped carpenter's workbench, and, when weary of mental exercise, he was often found there with his tools, busy on some convenience for the house, some necessary repairs, or some toy for the little ones of the family; for this occupation he had a natural gift that had been practiced diligently in the primitive days on a western farm.

When the Civil War began, Mr. Brunson, although far beyond the age when men are expected to undertake active military operations, volunteered, his services were accepted as a chaplain, and he was assigned to the Thirty-first Regiment of Wisconsin Volunteers. In the summer of 1863 ill health made a furlough necessary, and this, because of physical weakness, was terminated by resignation. To him belongs the rare honor of having served his country both in the War of 1812 and in that of 1861-65. After the war, he continued his work as a Methodist itinerant until 1873, when he had attained the age of eighty. He was during his later years one of the most prominent members of West Wisconsin Conference, and was four times chosen to represent it at the quadrennial General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Nothing in later life gave this enthusiastic and indefatigable worker the pain that came to his heart with the realization that he was "a superannuate." No regret of his

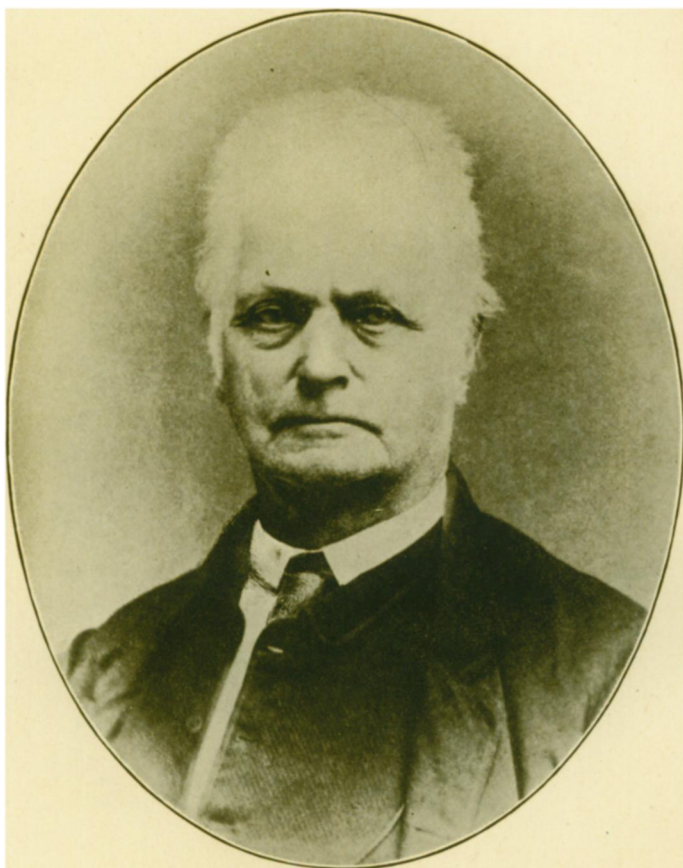
life was so poignant. His usefulness, however, was not terminated, and with the undaunted spirit that had characterized his entire life, he met this new adversity—for such he looked upon it. He was made an associate editor of the *Northwestern Christian Advocate* published at Chicago, an honorary correspondent of the New England Methodist Historical Society, and he became a correspondent of several newspapers and magazines whose management valued the ripe knowledge, clear thinking, and reasoning faculties, that, to the end, remained unclouded.

Among the articles from his pen the following are in the *Wisconsin Historical Collections*: “Ancient Mounds of Crawford County”; “Wisconsin Geographical Names”; “Early History of Wisconsin”; “Sketch of Hole-in-the-day”; “A Methodist Circuit Rider’s Tour”; “Death of Tecumseh;” “Memoir of Thomas Pendelton Burnett.” In the press of his day appeared articles showing the wide range of subjects to which he gave thought and attention. Some of these subjects were: “Tom Paine’s Death”; “Death of Old Abe”; “How Life Looks at Eighty-three”; “The Irrepressible Woman Preacher”; “Universal Taxation”; “Masonic Cornerstone”; “The Turko-Russian War, a Prophecy”; “Spelling Reform”; “The Pillager Indian”; “Sketch of Political History”; “Water in Wisconsin,” etc. He was also the author of two books. In 1872 the Methodist Book Concern brought out in two volumes, *A Western Pioneer: or incidents in the Life and Times of Rev. Alfred Brunson related by himself*; and nine years later the same house published his *Key to the Apocalypse*.

Mr. Brunson’s first family consisted of two sons and six daughters all of whom were grown and married at the time of their mother’s death, which occurred during the epidemic of fever that swept over the country in 1846. The sons, Ira Burr and Benjamin W., surveyed much of the new territory into which they came with their father, and laid out the city

of St. Paul where Benjamin lived from its early settlement to the time of his death in 1898. The elder, Ira Burr, always lived near his father, and between them existed one of those rare bonds that bridged the twenty years that lay between their ages in a companionship more like that of brothers or friends than that of father and son. Mr. Brunson's second marriage was to Miss Caroline S. Birge, of Belvidere, Illinois, and to her two daughters came, Mrs. Elizabeth B. Hitchcock, still a resident of Wisconsin, and the writer of this sketch. We are said to be the only children in Wisconsin of a participant in both the War of 1812 and the Civil War. Mr. Brunson's third wife was Miss Malinda Richards, of Paris Hill, New York; she survived him ten years.

On the morning of August 3, 1882, the subject of this sketch passed from life after months of painful suffering, borne with the meek patience that was the strongest argument possible for the faith he so loyally defended. He sleeps in the old Lower Town Cemetery at Prairie du Chien, where his grave has been marked by the Daughters of 1812 and by the Grand Army of the Republic.



**ALFRED BRUNSON**

From a photograph in the Wisconsin Historical Library